

OPINION

A win for brave veterans

BY CONGRESSMAN BOB FILNER

Last week, the Committee on Veterans' Affairs of the House of Representatives passed legislation to improve the lives of Filipino World War II veterans and many of their widows and dependent children who are permanently living in the United States.

The first bill provides access to VA hospitals, nursing home care, and medical services for all Filipino World War II veterans in the United States in the same manner as U.S. veterans.

A second bill doubles the amount of disability compensation currently paid to New Philippine Scouts in the United States, as well as the dependency and indemnity compensation (DIC) being received by widows and dependent children of Filipino World War II veterans in the United States. This is a giant step forward in our quest to restore all benefits to all Filipino veterans who fought during World War II.

As most of our readers know, over 50 years ago, many of the brave Filipino soldiers of World War II, drafted into service by President Franklin D. Roosevelt, exhibiting great courage at the epic battles of Bataan and Corregidor, were unceremoniously deprived of all veterans' benefits due them when Congress passed the Rescissions Act 1946. We owe the Philippine soldiers a great deal, and I have been fighting to restore these benefits ever since I became a Congressman.

The bills that have just passed the Veterans' Affairs Committee have bi-partisan support in Congress and the support of President Bush and Secretary of Veterans Affairs, Anthony Principi. Benefits for Filipino World War II veterans have been supported by editorials in the *San Diego Union-Tribune*, the *Los Angeles Times*, and the *Washington Post*, as well as other newspapers.

Actors Rob Schneider and Lou Diamond Philips have produced a video, a moving story of why we must grant benefits, which has been distributed to Members of Congress.

At one level, this legislation restores many of the benefits that were denied in 1946. But at a deeper level, the bills say that we will restore dignity and honor to these proud veterans. These bills say that we will remedy historical injustice. We will make good on the promise of America.

You have heard about President Truman's statement in 1946 when he signed the bill that had various other appropriation matters but which also included the infamous rescission of Filipino benefits. He said that there was injustice in this rescission!

"Filipino Army veterans," he stated, "fought as American Nationals under the American flag and under the direction of our military leaders. They fought with gallantry and courage under the most difficult conditions during the recent conflict.

Their officers were commissioned by us. Their official organization, the Army of the Philippine Commonwealth, was taken into the Armed Forces of the United States by Executive Order of President Roosevelt. That order has never been revoked or amended. I consider it a moral obligation of the United States to look after the welfare of the Filipino Army veterans." The moral obligation that President Truman spoke of remains with us today.

Over fifty years of injustice burns in the heart of Filipino World War II veterans and in the hearts of their sons and daughters. It is time to grant justice in their final years. That is why the passage of this legislation is so important.

These bills will soon go to the full House of Representatives for a vote, and the United States Senate will soon be holding a hearing on benefits for Filipino World War II veterans. I welcome your support as I work to pass this legislation in the House and in the Senate as quickly as possible.

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